

12.7.2007 - In Honor of Our Miners

West Virginia was built on the backs of our miners, and it is fitting that we honor the profession that is so tightly woven into the tapestry of our heritage and our history.

One-hundred years ago this week, over 360 brave West Virginian miners were lost in the Monongah Mine Disaster, the deadliest mining and industrial accident in U.S. history. Today, we recognize December 6 as Miner's Day, a day of reflection when we can show appreciation for their sacrifices, honor their accomplishments, and remember the tragedies that far too many of our miners and their families have suffered.

These disasters are sober reminders of the risks that miners are routinely exposed to in their work. But as we remember those who perished in the Monongah Mines and those brave miners who have perished in our nation's mines in the years since, we also honor the many incredible accomplishments miners have helped our country to achieve.

Miners are a part of one of America's greatest assets-our unbeatable work force.

Thanks to miners, America has achieved levels of military strength and economic vitality that are the envy of the world.

To those who have donned a miner's cap and entered a coal mine, to those who have toiled in support of your brothers and sisters in the mines-I thank you for your incredible service to this country. And I say that your service is vastly under-appreciated.

As President Woodrow Wilson once said of the miner, "If he slacks or fails, armies and statesmen are helpless."
But West Virginia's miners have never slacked and never failed.

Their ranks mined the coal that saw America through the industrial revolution. Today, they mine the coal that powers our technological revolution.

They mined the coal that fueled America's military might in wars past. Today, they mine the coal that promises to power our military in the future-coal that can be turned into liquid fuel to help ease the grip that oil-wielding foreign despots have on our economy and our security.

Whether powering our cities or fueling our transportation sector, the coal that hard-working miners, right here in West Virginia, provide is the most promising answer to our nation's most pressing energy needs.

For their might, their muscle, and their sacrifices, America owes our miners and their families a debt of gratitude.

In recent years we have made great strides in major mine safety reform. But as we have seen in the loss of brother miners this year, our work is not over.

My lasting appreciation goes to all those families who have lost loved ones in the mines. Their losses are great indeed. The renewed emphasis on mine safety that has emerged over the past year is directly attributable to their fierce conviction that some good would come of their heartbreak. What resulted from their grief is a legacy worthy of their loved ones-a renewed national commitment to the health safety of all coal miners.

And my deep thanks also extends to the many West Virginians who work as mine inspectors, going into the mines to help protect the health and lives of miners. So many of our inspectors have spent part of their careers mining coal and feel a brotherhood with those they are now charged with protecting.

Today the battle cry of Mother Jones continues to ring throughout the hills and hollows of West Virginia and in all the mines across this land: "Pray for the dead and fight like hell for the living."

For those who have lost their lives in the mines we pray. For those who today toil in danger, for future miners, for mining families, and for our proud mining communities-the fight continues.

But they are not alone. The role of the miner is just as important today as it was 100 years ago to our state and to our nation.

May we all come together, each Miner's Day, to remember those who have lost their lives toiling underground, to pray for those who still descend into darkness day after day so that the rest of the country might have light, and to renew our commitment to making our mines as safe as possible for the generations to come.